

HINDUISM vs MOVEMENT OF UNTOUCHABLES IN INDIA

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HINDUISM vs UNTOUCHABLES' MOVEMENT IN INDIA

(V. T. Rajshekar)

1. Introduction : We are thankful to the Christian Conference of Asia for having given us an opportunity to present the case of Untouchables forming over 20% of India's 800 million population. Christians have rendered such a signal service to the liberation of Untouchables that it can be written only in letters of gold when we rewrite the Indian history. Once kept out of the Hindu religion as outcastes, the Untouchables of India today present the world's goriest form of Apartheid before which the South African racial segregation and other Black problems of US and UK pale into insignificance. But, alas, the Indian Apartheid has received hardly any world attention as the Ruling Class has kept it a closely guarded secret.

If the Untouchables are what they are today, it is only because of Hindu religion, which is followed by about 80% of the Indian population. The correct name of Hinduism is *Brahminism*, imported to India by the Aryan invaders. Hinduism, considered the world's most ancient religion, has no parallel in the world.

A bundle of contradictions, a boneless wonder, words such as Hinduism, Hindus or Hindustan not at all figure in the Sanskrit "sacred scriptures" of Hindus. These texts do not even give a name to this religion. It has no founder. It has neither a church nor one single text like the Bible or the Koran.

The question "Who is a Hindu?" can be answered in the negative : one who is not a Muslim, Christian or a Parsee is a

Hindu. Its priests are unique in the world. They not only belong to one caste (Brahmins) but hereditary. At least 95% of the Hindus do not know their "holy books". A majority of them do not even regularly visit temples. At least 30% of the Hindus are not admitted into Hindu temples.

Therefore, Hinduism cannot be defined except that we can identify that a Hindu is one who is by birth. Caste system, of which untouchability is a part, is the foundation on which Hinduism is built. You remove caste, the Hindu edifice falls like a house of cards. So every Hindu must have a caste. Without a caste there can be no Hindu. Nay, caste system is the other name for Hinduism. Caste and untouchability are deathless because they have divine sanction. Even the Hindu gods belong to different castes. And one god fights with another god because of caste rivalry.

Hinduism is, therefore, a vast madhouse. Nay, the madest house in the whole world. India, because of this has become a sick country and its sickness is affecting the health of other nations. Look at Ceylon, Singapore, Malaysia, UK, Canada, etc. True Hinduism is actually practised only by Brahmins who form the apex of the caste pyramid. They form not even 5% of the Hindu population and yet as "gods of earth" they control everything—all the property and privileges. And, therefore, rightly constitute India's "Ruling Class", supplying every Prime Minister that India had (barring one for a very brief period) since 'Independence' including Mrs. Indira Gandhi. None can rule India except the Brahmin. This is the power that Hinduism has conferred on the Brahmin.

Hinduism is so powerful that though a foreign religion, it devoured every protest movement including the most liberating Buddhism, which was destroyed and driven out of India over 2000 years back. Brahmins led by the Shankaracharya literally slaughtered Buddhists. Buddhism today reigns in other

parts of the world but not to be found inside India—except for a feeble attempt made by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the saviour of the Untouchables and the new rising star of India, at the fag end of his life by himself embracing Buddhism along with several millions of Untouchables.

Efforts are being made to strengthen Hinduism and the Government itself is actively helping the process making the Christians and Muslims nervous and making them feel that the Government in India is pro-Hindu. A Hindu fundamentalist, (Fascist) party called the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is vigorously at it by fanning communal flames and periodically resorting to torture of Untouchables, Tribals, Muslims and Christians. The ultimate aim of the RSS is to clamp a class-caste Fascist dictatorship, before which the Hitler's Nazi rule will pale into insignificance, crush the Untouchables and castrate the minorities. In Kerala, the RSS is engaged in a battle with Marxists and several hundreds have been already killed.

2. *Untouchables and Tribes, Original Inhabitants of India :*

Untouchables and tribes who together make a formidable third of India's population are the original inhabitants of this ancient country. But the invading Aryans drove them out and those fled to hills and forests became tribes and those driven out of village limits became Untouchables.

The stigma of untouchability is not confined to Untouchables alone. In fact one caste is untouchable to the other Hindu caste. Ascending order of reverence and descending degree of contempt. But what are called as "Harijans", meaning "children of god" in the words of Gandhi, suffer not merely from untouchability, but unapproachability, unseeability, unspeakability, etc. Dogs and cats are let inside the house but not an Untouchable.

Therefore, every village in India has become a ghetto, which is the worst part reserved for these born bonded slaves who are expected to render free service to the Hindus without expecting anything in return. They do all the menial jobs:— cleaning, sweeping, scavenging, agricultural operations, carrying dead cattle and eating its carcass. Building constructions. Every dirty job. While the men are Untouchables, the women can be enjoyed by the high caste men. This is the concept of Hindu justice.

Socialism has no place under Hinduism. But the country's Constitution has forced the Government to introduce some socialist reforms. So we live under such serious contradictions and perpetual clash between fascist ideology of the Hinduism and the socialist slogans of the Government. The Constitution has given the Untouchables a paper "reservations" in jobs etc.

Untouchability among Hindus is thus a unique phenomenon unknown to humanity in any other part of the world. Nothing like it is to be found in any other society—primitive, ancient or modern. The sociologists and historians of India are not interested in the problems of Untouchables because they all belong to the high caste.

3. *Why Beef-eating Brahmins became vegetarians?*

The first organised protest movement against Brahminism was launched by the Buddha and Untouchables joined it en masse. Dr. Ambedkar has discovered that before the Aryans invaded India, the language of India was Tamil. He said the war between Buddhism and Brahminism and the defeat of the former resulted in its followers being driven out of the village limits. Brahmins who were the enemies of Buddhism adopted the trick of sabotaging Buddhism by infiltrating it. They conducted a war against Buddhism both from without

and within. And after vanquishing Buddhism, they inflicted untouchability upon those defeated.

Another ingenious method the Brahmins adopted to destroy Buddhism was to give up beef eating and becoming strict vegetarians. The Brahmins were the most gluttonous beef-eaters and the Vedic texts have any number of references to their indiscriminate killing of cows and eating them. Killing brought them joy. In fact, cow was reserved for the Brahmin stomach.

The Brahmins also excelled in drinking intoxicating liquor and merry-making. When the Brahmins gave up eating beef other Hindus also followed them. If the non-Brahmins underwent one revolution by giving up beef-eating, Brahmins underwent a double revolution. They gave up meat-eating for the first time and became vegetarians.

“To my mind, it was the strategy which made the Brahmins give up beef-eating and start worshipping the cow. The clue to the worship of cow is to be found in the struggle between Buddhism and Brahminism and the means adopted by Brahminism to establish its supremacy over Buddhism”. (Dr. Ambedkar, *Untouchables*, pg. 151.)

Why the Brahmins resorted to such a reckless adventure, a supreme sacrifice of giving up their greatest pleasure in life? Ambedkar says : “Without becoming vegetarians, the Brahmins could not have recovered the ground they had lost in its revival, namely Buddhism”. (Idid, page 154).

Brahmins who have beaten the Jews in cunning and craftiness, deceit and treachery wanted to beat extremism by extremism. It is a fantastic strategy. The only way to beat Buddhism was to go one step forward and become vegetarians.

Today Brahmins (barring those in Kashmir and Bengal) are pure vegetarians and non-drinkers.

Non-violence was absorbed into Brahminism which from the day of the defeat of Buddhism came to be called as Hinduism. The Vedic religion of Brahminism was sacrificed to save Brahmins and destroy the revolutionary philosophy of Buddhism and thus permanently condemn India to slavery and serfdom. That is how India, which has the world's largest but the most famished cattle population, turned into a cow-worshipper as a result of the triumph of Brahminism over Buddhism. It was a means adopted by Brahmins to regain their lost glory. This supreme sacrifice of the Brahmins proves that the 'Jews of India' were prepared to go to any extreme and make any compromise to save Brahminism.

To them Brahminism is more important than India. Every foreign invader was invited by them to serve their selfish ends. India today is one of the poorest countries of the world (11th poorest as per the latest World Bank report), a sick nation, because of Brahminism, *Not only if the Untouchables are to be saved, but if India itself has to be saved, Brahminism will have to be destroyed.* That is why the Untouchables, being the original owners of India, have decided to escape from the tyranny of Brahminism.

4. *India Is Not a Nation*

The Hindu fundamentalists now led by the RSS often boast about the "Indian nationalism". They are spending a lot of money and time to rouse this "national patriotism" among Hindus. But are the Indians a nation?

Each religion : Muslims, Christians and Hindus, constitute a different but perpetually warring nation. Muslims (15%) and Christians (3%) are being persecuted by the Hindu

brute majority. Apart from this, the Untouchables (20%) and tribes (10%) each constitute a separate nation. Sikhs are now rightly demanding a separate nation-Khalistan. Besides, each caste is a separate nation within Hinduism.

Hinduism is thus a vast prison-house of warring nationalities. Nationality is a social feeling. It is a longing not to belong to any other group. This is the essence of what is called a nationality and national feeling. But in India, race, language and country do not suffice to create a nation. A nation is a living soul, a spiritual principle.

“Suffering in common is a greater bond of union than joy. As regards national memories, mournings are worth more than triumphs, for they impose duties, they demand common effort”. (Renan quoted by Dr. Ambedkar in his book, *Thoughts on Pakistan*, Thacker & Co., 2nd edition-1945, pg. 17).

As consciousness increases along with literacy and other factors, Muslims, Christians and each caste within Hinduism will clamour for separateness and some people expect India to be torn to pieces in course of time.

The Hindu ethos stands for division and disintegration and not for unity. The seeds of destruction are within Hinduism itself. Nobody need destroy it. Hinduism will destroy itself. But will it ?.

5. *Apartheid in India-A World Problem*

The Untouchables of India constitute the worst form of Apartheid. The Negroes are employed as household servants in White houses and therefore, they are not untouchables. But India's Untouchables are kept outside, segregated in all areas their very touch, look, even thought leads to pollution. A Black man can be made out from the colour of the skin but

not so the Untouchable. He may be fairer than the Brahmin. So nobody can identify an Untouchable by the mere skin-colour.

Therefore, the Indian untouchability like the Black problem is not a problem arising out of colour prejudice. It is a mental problem created by the caste system. That makes it the most serious problem in the whole world. But, alas, no world body, UNO, International Court of Justice, Human Rights Commission or anybody for that matter, had ever bothered about the Untouchables who in sheer number excel the American Negroes or for that matter the Palestinians or any other struggling group.

Therefore, it is a world problem of the greatest importance and the highest priority.

The only people to spare some thought to the Indian Apartheid are the Christians. The World Council of Churches & CCA have done a lot. And because of this they have invited the wrath of the Indian Ruling Class. If the Christians are interested in saving India and thereby the Untouchables they will have to intensify their efforts.

6. Class & Caste : India's Twin Great Divide

While every other country in the world (barring Communist countries) is divided into rich and poor ('class division' to put it in Marxian terminology), India has not only its rich and poor but also high and low castes. That means in India the people are not only divided horizontally as rich and poor, but vertically into high and low caste—one cutting across the other. That means the Brahmin belonging to the highest caste may be poor but an Untouchable minister like Jagjivan Ram may be quite rich. This is the most baffling problem faced by no other country in the world.

If other countries have to destroy only the "classes", we in India have the twin menace of "class" and "caste". Since the loyalty of both the rich and the poor are first to their caste, it is difficult to unite the poor of a caste against the rich of their own caste. The frequent "caste wars" in India have conclusively proved that poor Hindus will not join hands with Untouchables—who are economically the poorest and socially the lowest.

Therefore, India presents a paradox where no general mobilisation of the poor is possible.

Even Buddhism and Christianity have not escaped caste division because originally they were also Hindus.

Sociologists by and large endorse our opinion that in India "caste" is a "class". A mobile caste is a class. The low castes are all poor and higher castes are generally the rich. But one thing can be said with confidence *that in India it will not be possible to launch a 'class struggle' without first destroying the caste.* At least a simultaneous thrust : "class-caste struggle" has to be launched. But our Marxist comrades do not agree with this argument. The Hindus are also not prepared for this. Since Hinduism is the other name for caste system, any attack on caste means a direct assault on property and privileges that the caste brings. Since every caste and sub-caste stands to benefit from this grand system, no Hindu is prepared to give up caste.

Currently the high caste Hindus are making a lot of noise over the mass conversion of Untouchables to Islam. To prevent it they say they want to destroy untouchability. Hindu leaders including Gandhi say that they want to eradicate untouchability. But nobody is complaining against the caste system. Because they know that untouchability being part of caste system, it is not possible to remove untouchability alone

without destroying the caste system, which in turn means destroying Hinduism. So when Gandhi and other Hindu leaders talk against untouchability, they are not sincere. Gandhi, whom Ambedkar described as a Hindu leader and the Enemy No. 1 of Untouchables, wanted only a patchwork solution. Gandhi was content with reform but Ambedkar wanted Revolution and asked dalits to quit Hinduism and go in for conversion.

7. Marxists Betray Revolution

India being one of the poorest countries in the world, all the factors necessary for revolution exist there. The Marxist parties are about 50 years old. And they are a force to be reckoned with. But the country is nowhere near a revolution. This is because the Marxist leadership is in the hands of the Brahmins who are not really ready to launch a struggle to destroy caste as it will effect the property and privileges of their caste. *And without destroying caste, it is not possible to destroy class.* They are not prepared to combine caste struggle with class struggle.

The Untouchables and tribals are born revolutionaries. Nobody wants revolution more urgently than these two sections. But the Marxists have no programme to attract them. The Left parties do not inspire these revolutionary sections. And quite a number of them not only feel that Marxists in India are far from revolution but actually counter revolutionaries.

8. Religious Revolution

As the Marxists have betrayed revolution, Untouchables are forced to take the only other path available—a religious solution. Thousands of Untouchables and tribes, therefore, embraced Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism and Islam and the flow is increasing.

It is to be noted that the Untouchables of India are subjected to torture not because they are poor. There are any number of poor in India and Untouchables are only a part of it. The country itself has over 50% living below the "poverty line". But why Untouchables alone are subjected to torture? Not because of their poverty, but their degrading social status. So the problem of exploitation and poverty in India is due to social causes and not economic factors. The main cause of India's poverty is, therefore, social and next only economic.

The social degradation of the Untouchables having had religious sanction under Hinduism, the Untouchables have no other go but to get out of this gas chamber of Hinduism and seek fresh air under other liberating religions: Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism, etc. Therefore, conversion to other religions has become popular among the Untouchables. Not because after conversion to Christianity and Islam the problem of poverty would be solved. To them poverty is not their No. 1 problem. Man cannot live by bread alone. He wants self-respect which is denied under Hinduism. They will get it the moment they get out of Hinduism and convert to other religions.

Untouchables have discovered that conversion helps them as they will no longer be subjected to atrocities. Conversion to other religions, therefore, helps the Untouchables to destroy caste paving the way or rather helping them to go to the next phase: "class struggle".

Ambedkar chose Buddhism after a 20-year-long thinking on the subject but unfortunately Buddhism, having been considered a part of Hinduism has proved to be ineffective in destroying untouchability because those who embraced Buddhism along with Ambedkar are still treated as Untouchables by the Hindus. So the Untouchables mostly prefer

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539

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Christianity and lately in one State, Tamil Nadu, the trend is towards Islam.

9. *Role of Christians*

As already stated, the sickness of Hinduism is so contagious that it has not spared any other religion. Those who went over to Christianity carried their caste with them and we have evidence that to gain more members, the Church leaders allowed the converts to keep their caste identity. There are even today separate graveyards in the Church for Untouchable converts.

But one thing : Christianity or Islam does not sanction caste distinction. Anybody fighting against caste within the Church or Islam, will get support of their religion. But not so under Hinduism. That is why inside the Church in India, there is a powerful movement to fight caste discrimination. Despite the caste distinction the Untouchable converts to Christianity are today emotionally and psychologically much better off than their counterparts who preferred to stay behind in Hinduism.

The latest trend towards Islam in Tamil Nadu, the southernmost State of India, is a new development that has rattled the Hindu clergy. Even the Government has expressed alarm and there are fresh moves to ban conversions and stop the flow of foreign funds to India. There are charges that Arab countries are financing the conversion drive but Government investigation did not prove it. It is only a few thousand Untouchables who embraced Islam in Tamil Nadu.

Mass conversion to Islam is not new to this area but the orthodox Hindus and the fundamentalist party, RSS, are worried about this trend because a Hindu considers Islam as the most inveterate enemy of Brahminism. Islam has no caste distinction. The Untouchables are attracted to this because of its egalitarianism. Even some Christian converts have opted to Islam.

10. *Hinduism is anti-human*

The above account is sufficient to convince anybody that Hinduism is not only anti-democratic but anti-human. Even the Brahmins, the custodians of Hinduism, have not benefitted materially from this suffocating religion. Hundreds of Brahmins have fled the "holy" India and settled in "unholy" US, UK and Gulf countries. Quite a number of them are still complaining of their own poverty in India.

Foreigners are likely to be deceived by the propaganda of nonviolence, the Gandhian *Ahimsa*. But as representatives of the Untouchables, we would like to blast this myth. Nowhere in the world we can get a set of people who are more violent and blood-thirsty than the Hindus.

Hinduism is no doubt dying. Christianity and Islam have a better future in India. Urbanisation and scientific development have set fire to the very citadel of Brahminism. But what keeps the dying Hinduism alive are the two main props : caste system and the *Karma* theory—the belief in rebirth, predestiny.

The Hindus talk about democracy and socialism but "majority rule" in India has resulted in majority tyranny on the minorities who are reduced to the level of second-rate citizens—a persecuted minority. India will soon plunge into a bloody communal and caste war.

Christianity has helped millions of Untouchables to get liberation. The tribes of the Eastern India are today a force to be reckoned with because of Christianity. All those who went over to Christianity are definitely better off than those who stuck to Hinduism. If Christianity has to attract more followers, it has to immediatly set its house in order by getting rid of the caste within the Church. Secondly, they have to render all-out help to Untouchables and tribes. WCC & CCA can send a team to India to investigate the position of Untouchables and we will render all help.

11. *Solution*

The Untouchables of India are so weak—socially, economically, culturally, politically and even physically—that they no longer have the patience to wait for a revolution, which has proved elusive. Therefore, instead of waiting endlessly for the revolution, they have decided to seek their own solution to their problems.

1. The first and the foremost programme is to quit Hinduism and seek refuge in any religion that assures them social status.

2. They will fight for a separate state. They are currently scattered all over India and live in isolated ghettos. Being in a minority, thoroughly disarmed and totally dispossessed, they face danger to their life, property and the honour of their women. So to get safety and security they have to seek a separate State, Dalitastan. And pending such a statehood, Untouchables are migrating to bigger cities. Organised shifting of population is also planned.

3. Every Untouchable is asked to carry an arm for his self-protection.

4. International organisations, UNO, and particularly Christians and Muslims have a duty to support the liberation struggle of the Untouchables. Our struggle needs to be linked up with the other struggling groups of Blacks, Burakus, Palestinians, Marxists and other friends.

On behalf of the Untouchables of India, we thank the CCA-URM led by George Ninan and ably assisted by Kurata.

(Paper presented on behalf of the Untouchables of India at the Asian Conference on the "Role of Religion and National Harmony" organised by the Christian Conference of Asia—held at Colombo, Sri Lanka, Oct. 28 to Nov. 3, 1981).

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